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Address of
Mr. John
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ADDRESS OF
Mr. John W. Kempster
ON THE GREAT CONFLICT BETWEEN
RIGHT and MIGHT
BEFORE THE
ULSTER LIBERAL ASSOCIATION
BELFAST, IRELAND

New York

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ADDRESS OF

Mr. JOHN W. KEMPSTER

ON

“THE GREAT CONFLICT BETWEEN
RIGHT AND MIGHT”

Reprint from THE ULSTER GUARDIAN, September 19, 1914

To the East Belfast Branch of the Ulster Liberal Association belongs the credit of being the first in the field in holding a public meeting in Belfast for the purpose of discussing the present war and the tremendous issues involved.

The interest taken by the general public was evidenced by the large attendance—hundreds being unable to obtain admission. In one respect, at least, the meeting was unique in the political annals of Belfast, inasmuch as party politics were rigorously excluded, all the speeches being confined to the European situation.

The back of the platform was beautifully decorated with the national flags of Great Britain and the Allies—France, Belgium, Russia and Japan.

Mr. Kempster's address was a lucid and comprehensive survey of the whole situation. Beginning with an historic résumé of the rise and progress of Germany, the speaker dealt in turn with the balance of power in Europe: the situation preceding the war; the Balkan question; the White Paper; Germany's attitude and the issues now at stake. The address was listened to throughout with rapt attention, and the hearty and unanimous applause which

punctuated the speech showed how effectively the speaker had carried his audience with him. Amongst those present on the platform were Messrs. Harford H. Montgomery (chairman), the Right Hon. R. G. Glendinning, Rev. R. W. Seaver, B.D.; Rev. W. J. Calvin, Thomas Scott, J.P.; Wm. Hunter, J.P.; Samuel Hall, James Wood, Wm. Mateer, J. W. Diamond, H. A. Crooks, J.P.; J. Steadman, J. R. T. Mulholland, J.P.; A. P. Kempster, S. J. Forrest, A. H. Kerr, W. H. Davey, M.A., B.L. (Editor of *Ulster Guardian*); Thomas M'Dowell (Organizing Secretary Ulster Liberal Association); and Henry H. Graham, J.P. (Hon. Secretary Ulster Liberal Association), etc., etc.

The Chairman, who was heartily received, said that, although called under the auspices of that association, it was not a political party meeting, and questions regarding home politics would be rigidly excluded from the remarks made by Mr. Kempster and others who might address them. (Applause.) Whatever might have been their differences in the past, however acute they might become in the future, to-night he hoped and believed they stood as a united people, banded together by a common purpose, and that not only for defensive and offensive action against a common foe, but for the protection of the rights and liberties of other nations, either smaller and weaker, or less fortunately situated geographically than they were. (Loud Applause.)

THE GREAT CONFLICT.

Our Empire is engaged in the greatest struggle of the world's history, a life and death conflict for its very existence, and in face of such transcendent issue, party politics should dissolve and only patriotism remain. Each citizen, whether privileged to fight or merely to work and

help, by whatsoever means at his disposal, must bear full share in the heat and burden of this tremendous contest, which is one between freedom, justice, public law, and honor on the one hand, as opposed to self-aggrandizement, brute force, and broken pledges. (Applause.) This is not an ordinary European war. It is the attempt of one great military power, Germany, aided by Austria, its satrap, to become supreme, and to dominate and shape the policy of the world. We have, in the past, faced greater odds with fewer friends, and, now however prolonged the conflict, and at whatever cost, the war must be carried through to a successful finish. (Loud applause.) Our honor as a nation, and our Empire are at stake, and to falter now would be to submerge our cherished liberties, and to throw back civilization for all time. (Applause.)

Mr. Kempster then proceeded to trace the rise of Germany, showing how from a struggle for freedom, the aim of the German peoples was turned to a war of conquest, which found its first fruits in the victory over France in 1870 and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Having explained and considered the doctrine of the balance of power in Europe, the main object of which was by an artificial grouping of the leading nations to prevent any one Power being able to dominate all the others, the speaker dealt with the European situation preceding the war, when the whole Continent of Europe for nearly forty years has been an armed camp. This armed peace was on the verge of breaking down in 1912 over the Balkan War, which was indirectly occasioned by Austria's action and by German intrigue. It nearly precipitated at the time a general conflagration. Thanks largely to the efforts of a British statesman, Sir Edward Grey—(applause)—a precarious peace was temporarily effected. But there is no doubt that this act of Austria's revealed

Austro-German policy, and at the recent Balkan Conference, held in London, our diplomatists saw the drift of impending events.

THE AUSTRO-GERMAN COUP.

The storm was gathering, and one morning news flashed round the world that the heir to the Austrian throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, had been assassinated at Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. It is asserted by Austria that the deed was done by an agent in the secret service of Servia, a Slav State; but this is denied by the Servian Government, which pointed out that the assassins were Austrian subjects. Austria demanded instant reparation. But behind Austria was Germany. Thwarted by Agadir and Algeciras, the Kaiser would brook no further diplomatic rebuff. Germany was ready as in 1870; she had Austria at her side; Italy, too, she thought. She looked around, and saw France in the throes of a political squabble; Russia not yet recovered from defeat by Japan; England absorbed in domestic reform, and political division in Ireland, her army and fleet seemingly disaffected, and civil war, according to her press and publicists, impending. The Kiel Canal was just completed, doubling the strategic value of the German fleet. The time of the year was, as in 1870, suitable for marching. So she again threw down her iron dice, but this time, not for European, but for world power. "*Unser Zukunft liegt auf das Meer*"—"Our future lies on the sea," and *Deutschland uber alles*,"—"Germany above all," were in her thoughts. France must be "bled white," Russia must be beaten back and weakened. Still the British Empire barred the way to world dominion. It, too, must be crushed and humiliated. Bismarck contemptuously branded his opponents in Germany who pressed for internal reform as those who

“wore blinkers and only saw a spot of the world.” The present Kaiser, though he dropped the pilot, did not drop his policy, but added to it “Cæsardom.”

THE WHITE PAPER.

The next chapter in the book of fate is best told in the White Paper, a verbatim report of the correspondence and negotiations between the Great Powers of Europe. This document is a credit to the cleanness of British diplomacy and its distinguished Minister. (Applause.) From first to last, Great Britain strove, now by this suggestion, then by that, skilfully and patiently, for peace, aided by Italy and France, and backed by Russia. But Austria was implacable, and Germany, who by a single word to Austria could have done so much, did nothing, nor pretended to do anything, till it was obviously too late, though knowing, as is proved by the White Paper, that war with Russia would inevitably follow an Austrian attack on Servia, domination of Servia by Austria being as intolerable to Russia as the dependence of the Netherlands to Germany would be to Great Britain. (Hear, hear.) Sir Edward Grey pointed out that he had never before seen one State address to another independent State a document of so formidable a character as the Austrian note to Servia, threatening the maintenance of Servia's independence, which, if accepted, would have been the greatest humiliation a country could undergo. There is ample evidence that the German Emperor was aware of the contents of this note prior to its dispatch. Russia clearly saw that the action was directed against her. The Servian Government agreed to all Austria's demands, except the article asking Servia to accept the collaboration in Servia of representatives of the Austro-Hungarian Government; but Servia went the length of declaring that

she would "admit such collaboration as agrees with the principles of international law, with criminal procedure, and with good neighborly relations." The Russian Ambassador at Vienna clearly perceived that Austria was determined on war, relying on Germany's assistance. Sir Edward Grey told the German Ambassador in London that the Servian reply went further than could have been expected, and urged moderation at Vienna. Even the German Secretary of State had to admit that there were some things in the Austrian note that Servia could hardly be expected to accept. Austria point blank rejected Servia's reply, and declared war with Servia. That more than mere chastisement was aimed at was evident, as the German Ambassador in Paris admitted that he could give no assurance that the independence of Servia would be respected. Despite denials, Germany was already overtly recalling officers on leave, and Russia started mobilizing. Germany then tried to purchase our assistance by a bribe, in the shape of an offer to respect French territory, but when pressed, admitted they could give no such undertaking in respect of the French colonies, nor as to respecting the neutrality of Belgium. Britain's honor was not for sale—(applause)—and Germany was so informed in polite terms. Our reply ran:—

"What Germany asks us in effect is to engage to stand by while French colonies are taken, and France is beaten, so long as Germany does not take French territory as distinct from the colonies. From the material point of view such a proposal is unacceptable, for France, without further territory in Europe being taken from her, could be so crushed as to lose her position as a Great Power, and become subordinate to German policy."

We, however, let it be known that we should not feel called upon to take part in a war over a purely Balkan question between Russia and Austria, or in a struggle for supremacy between Teuton and Slav; but if a general European war ensued, involving also Germany and France, where the hegemony of Europe was concerned, we reserved to ourselves the right to take whatever course seemed right. (Applause.) Our Foreign Secretary during the fortnight preceding the war sent telegram after telegram to Berlin, St. Petersburg, Rome, Paris and Belgrade, couched in sincere and frank language, all aiming at finding some peaceful solution acceptable to Austria and Germany, but all in vain. It is clear as noonday that both these Powers were determined on war, in default of a brutal humiliation, as a prelude to the next aggression. France pressed for Britain's support, but we did not commit ourselves, as unconditional support might have weakened our hands in the supreme effort for peace. It would have been a disgrace for us to make a bargain with Germany at the expense of France—(hear, hear)—a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never have recovered. (Hear, hear.) The German Chancellor also, in effect, asked us to bargain away whatever obligation or interest we have as regards the neutrality of Belgium. We could not entertain that bargain either. We emphasized that the one way of maintaining good relations between England and Germany was to work together to preserve the peace of Europe, and Sir Edward Grey made this remarkable overture for peace. He said:—

“If the peace of Europe can be preserved, my endeavor will be to promote some arrangement to which Germany could be a party, by which she could be assured that no aggressive or hostile policy would be

pursued against her or her allies, by France, Russia or ourselves, jointly or separately."

Could sincere good-will go further? Germany's reply was to prepare for offensive military action on the French frontier, and call up the reservists, her first move towards mobilization having been made on the precise day on which Austria presented her note to Servia. Still Sir Edward Grey did not despair, and told the German Ambassador that if Germany could get any reasonable proposal put forward which made it clear that Germany and Austria were striving to preserve European peace, and that Russia and France would be unreasonable if they rejected it, Great Britain would go the length of saying that if Russia and France would not accept it His Majesty's Government would have nothing to do with the consequences. By this time Austria was already moving troops against Russia, as well as against Servia. Then, though Russia and Germany were mobilizing, we still declined to give France a pledge to interfere, and asked both France and Germany to give assurance that they would respect the neutrality of Belgium. France assented, Germany refused to give any such undertaking, but asked whether, if she gave a promise not to violate Belgium neutrality, England would remain neutral. We rejected this specious proposal. Germany's motives were by this time obvious, and we wisely declined to bind our hands. Our honor was at stake. One last effort was made by Sir Edward Grey in an endeavor to bring Austria and Russia together, but it was too late to avert the impending catastrophe.

On August 1st Germany and France mobilized their armies, and Germany declared war upon Russia; a German force entered the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, and Germany also demanded a free passage through

Belgium, threatening in case of refusal to treat Belgium as an enemy. Little Belgium appealed to Great Britain—(applause)—her brave King asking King George for support in the following terms:—

“Remembering the numerous proofs of Your Majesty’s friendship, and that of your predecessor, and the friendly attitude of England in 1870, and the proof of friendship you have just given us again, I make a supreme appeal to the diplomatic intervention of Your Majesty’s Government to safeguard the integrity of Belgium.”

We replied that if Germany violated Belgium neutrality we would assist her, and sent our ultimatum to Germany, which expired at 12, midnight, on Tuesday, August 4th. (Applause.) Germany and Austria were shortly afterwards at war with Russia, France and ourselves.

THE GERMAN ATTITUDE.

Germany now tore off the flimsy mask, and drew the sword, soon to be stained with the blood of the heroic Belgians defending their homes against the power that had guaranteed their neutrality, and misery, cruelty, rapine, lust, fire and bloodshed dulled the shining armor of the War Lord. Not mere conquest, but destruction of defenceless towns and villages, soon marked the ruthless progress of the German Army, whose honor will for all times be stained by one of the greatest crimes committed by a nation, vandalism reminiscent of the Huns, the razing of the historic city of Louvain to the ground.

We have now traced the causes of the great conflict, and seen how Prussian militarism gradually acquired a predominance in Germany, and has aimed, first at

supremacy in Europe on land, and now at world-wide supremacy, involving command of the sea. France and Russia stand in the way of continental ambition and the British Empire obstructs Germany's pretensions to become the great world power. The German people, their finer feelings dulled by militarism, their passions inflamed by Pan-Germanic visions, are willing accomplices of the Emperor and his armies. Not that the whole German people have lost the idealism of their great poet, Goethe, and deliberately pursued their Machavelian policy, but the ruling caste has, and the nation having identified itself with the Napoleonic idea, cannot escape responsibility for the results. They hoped first to seduce the honor of our country, and next to destroy France and blot it from the map as a power; then, turning their forces eastward, to overawe and come to terms with Russia, and finally to make a supreme effort to crush our Empire, and on its downfall, despoil us of our colonies. But, thanks to the firmness and decision of our Government and people—(applause)—Russia, France and the British Empire now stand united against the common danger. (Applause.) What is the spirit that animates the German Emperor and the overwhelming majority of his countrymen? The Emperor, drawing his sword and brandishing it over his head, thus addressed his Foot Guards before they left Potsdam for the front:—

“I draw the sword that, with God's help, I have kept all these years in the scabbard. I have drawn the sword, which, without victory and honor, I cannot sheath again. All of you will see to it that only in honor is it returned to the scabbard. You are my guarantee that I can dictate peace to my enemies. Up and at the foes, and down with the enemies of Brandenburg.”

Contrast this theatrical and bombastic blasphemy with Abraham Lincoln's motto:—

“With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up this nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace.”

(Loud applause.)

THE GREAT ISSUES.

Finally, what are the broad issues? Were Germany to succeed, she would have destroyed France, weakened Russia, dismembered the British Empire. Australia and South Africa would be Germanized, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Switzerland would quickly lose their independence, Austria and the Balkan States would be at her feet, Italy would be powerless to resist whatever terms might be imposed upon her for future good behavior. Turkey, the sick man, Germany's fit ally, would get his deserts. And then, with Germany in command of the sea, our trade and commerce at her mercy, why, in the not too distant future, should not South America be within her sphere of influence? And if the United States proved unwilling to sacrifice her independence on the altar of Pan-Germanism, she, too, as a branch of the hated Anglo-Saxon race, might, in time of internal difficulty, be overawed.

But if Germany be beaten, as we must see she is—(hear, hear)—what will be the result? The power of German and Prussian militarism will be broken, its Imperial House discredited, possibly its dynasty ended, its phantasm of universal world dominion shattered. A new

Germany will arise, chastened, released from the thralldom of a despotic autocracy, and free to pursue a sane course toward liberty and real progress. (Applause.) The world will be rid of an oppressive nightmare, of impending catastrophe, and Europe, no longer an armed camp, will breathe freely once again. (Applause.)

The great conflict is between Right and Might, between Liberty and Tyranny, between the Spiritual and the Material. And be the conflict short or long, let us, the people of Great Britain and Ireland, and of the British Empire, face the grave issues that confront us with calm and unconquerable spirit. (Loud applause.)

THE RESOLUTION.

The Rt. Hon. R. G. Glendinning, who was loudly applauded, said it was his privilege to move the following resolution:—

“That this meeting of citizens of Belfast, profoundly believing that we are fighting in a just cause, for the vindication of the rights of small States, and the public law of Europe, pledges itself unswervingly to support the Prime Minister’s appeal to the nation, and all measures necessary for the prosecution of the war to a victorious conclusion, whereby alone the lasting peace of Europe can be assured.”

He thought that if ever a war took place in which a nation that apparently stood outside was justified in joining forces with others the present war was such. (Hear, hear.) They saw the position in which a small and gallant State was placed. Belgium was threatened by an overwhelming Power that proposed to march through her territory, and they had taken up the cause of that small State, and so were engaged in that tremendous war—perhaps the greatest that had ever been



seen. He was glad to say that the dark clouds which faced them in the first few weeks had materially brightened. (Applause.) The great bully of Europe was moving steadily away from France and Belgium, and he hoped that before many months had passed they would see him enclosed in Berlin, and as soon as that happened they might look forward to a revolution in Germany that would see the last of the Kaiser and his officers. (Applause.) The sooner that came the better for all Europe. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. Jas. Wood, who seconded the resolution, said he was a man of peace, and he agreed with the chairman that war was the last thing in the world, but if war could ever be defended, in his judgment, the war they had entered upon was not only a just war, but an absolutely necessary war. When the history of the future came to be written he believed that England would come out of it without a blot upon her escutcheon. (Applause.)

Rev. R. W. Seaver, B.D., said if he had any politics they were the politics of an Irish patriot—(applause)—the politics of one who believed that there was time when none should be for his party, but when all should be for the State. (Applause.) It was a treat to attend a meeting of Belfast citizens from which party politics were rigorously excluded. (Applause.) Mr. Kempster had delivered his lecture in a calm, impartial spirit, without any jingoism about it. He had striven to show them that they were fighting against the spirit of militarism. Like the other speakers, he looked upon war as a terrible evil, but sometimes force had to be used when all other power failed. They believed that war was the result of wrongdoing on some side; so far as they knew their hands were clean and their consciences pure. (Hear, hear.) Was it not a great thing to feel that England's Army in the last weeks of August had stood side by side unflinch-

ingly and with the old stubborn resistance through that awful ordeal at Mons, and saved the Allies' armies. (Applause.) He was proud to think that the same spirit that possessed their fathers at Waterloo still possessed them, and proved that they were not recreant sons of their sires. (Applause.) They had drawn the sword for justice in the name of God, and in that Name they would conquer. (Applause.) He hoped that this awful war would have the effect of making them better men and women, and that they would apply to the evils around them the same qualities they had displayed in that great struggle. They had many social evils in their midst—they had the cry of the outcast, the poor, and the sweated—and he hoped that now that their hearts had been touched and they had shown such noble charity toward the sufferings of their gallant soldiers and their wives and children, they would show the same spirit and apply it to the miseries of their city. (Applause.)

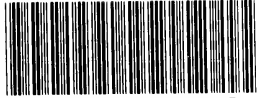
The resolution was then put to the meeting and unanimously passed, after which a hearty vote of thanks was passed to Mr. Kempster on the motion of Mr. Wm. Hunter, J.P., seconded by Mr. Thomas M'Dowell. Mr. Kempster having replied, the meeting terminated with the singing of the National Anthem.

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